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# ARMY TRANSFORMATION1953-1961: LESSONS OF THE "NEW LOOK" ARMY

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**ABSTRACT**

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The intent of this research paper is to examine the "transformation" of the U.S. Army during the Eisenhower Administration. Due to the administration's "New Look" strategy, the U.S. Army was forced to examine its role and relevance in light of a new strategic environment that relied almost exclusively on strategic bombing and nuclear weapons. However, the administration offered frustratingly little guidance on how the Army should accomplish this mission other than cutting its budget and structure. Faced with what was thought to be a revolution of military affairs (RMA), the Army undertook dramatic changes: extensively reorganizing the division, embracing the technology of guided missiles, enlarging the role of air defense and experimenting to understand the techniques, tactics and procedures needed to operate on the "atomic" battlefield--all at the expense of developing conventional weapons due to misplaced confidence in "emerging" technology that was projected for fielding. As the Army went through these changes, it experienced significant cultural uncertainty and professional debate. However, at the end of the Eisenhower administration, there was strong feeling that this transformation was misguided as evidenced by the impermanence of the "New Look" transformational changes. The Army quickly suspended the Pentomic reorganization and the Kennedy Administration adopted the concept of "Flexible Response." During this transformation, two successive Chiefs of Staff grappled with a highly controversial Secretary of Defense, highlighting the numerous shortcomings of the New Look policy. Their greatest concern was that the Army was not prepared to fight in limited wars, which was exactly the type of conflict the Army later faced. This scenario is worth examining as the Army 50 years later faces some of the same issues of trying to "get it right" in transformation.

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### INTRODUCTION

> One might find similarities between the Army of the 1950s and the Army of Today. The Army fought the Korean War with the tactics and equipment of World War II. However, President Eisenhower's "New Look" and nuclear, weapons strategy brought on a need for change. Therefore during the mid-50s, the Army faced political, budgetary and public pressures that drove it to reevaluate its doctrine and force structure. The advent of nuclear weapons and related technology became the remedy to obtain security without the cost of a large standing conventional force.
>
> —— Under Secretary of the Army Les Brownlee, 8 August 2003[1]

"Transformation" is one of the most talked about subjects in the U.S. Army today. The President, the Secretary of Defense and the new Army Chief of Staff all express the desire for the Army to continue on a path of transformation in this era of technological revolution and world change. Some would argue that the Army has been slow to adopt change. There is no doubt that General Shinseki and Secretary Rumsfield had significant disagreement over the path of Army transformation. Change is intrinsically hard for a large organization, especially one that embraces as much cultural and institutional baggage as the Army, yet radical change is not unknown to the Army. The U.S. Army has a history of facing change and adapting quickly. The Army executed a dramatic transformation in the 1950s. Facing a bewildering time of budget cuts and questions of relevance, officers debated the future of the institution itself. President Eisenhower's "New Look" strategy forced the Army to reflect and define its role on the atomic battlefield and yet offered little guidance and no vision of how all the services would operate. The Army, under the leadership of two particularly strong Chiefs of Staff, Generals Matthew B. Ridgway and Maxwell D. Taylor, embarked on an unprecedented era of technological change and experimentation. Army leaders at all levels attempted to peer out and predict what the future would look like. They contemplated the terrible effects of new weapons, changing geopolitical environments, and new roles and missions of land power. Although suspicious of the administration's cuts of the Army, leaders were highly optimistic about emerging technology and energetically pursued systems such as atomic weapons and guided missiles. The legacy of this bold transformation was in its extremely short life. By the end of the Eisenhower administration in 1961, it appeared that the Department of Defense and the Army had taken a wrong path. After numerous budget cuts, restructuring and reliance on nuclear weapons or immature technology, the Army was ill equipped to fight limited wars. The Department of Defense had prepared almost exclusively for strategic nuclear war at the expense of

conventional weapons for limited wars—exactly the kind of war that was emerging in South East Asia.

This paper examines the conditions that brought forth the transformation of the Army 1953-1961: How the Army under the leadership of two Chiefs of Staff adapted, what measures the Army took to transform and most importantly, the legacy and lessons this transformation holds for us today. In the end we find that the Army may be wary of radical change, but has and can transform quickly as it did in the 1950s. We discover the dangers of becoming mesmerized by emerging technology, and that transformation is more than just hardware. It emerges as a much more holistic enterprise. We learn that founding transformation on emerging technology can be fraught with risk if the technology does not arrive or is not funded. Furthermore, these dramatic changes can be surprisingly transient since predicting the future hasn't become any easier over time. It remains as valid today as it was then, that the leadership of the Department of Defense must offer a clear vision to the path of transformation. Transformation cannot only be based on the concept of doing more with less.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "NEW LOOK" STRATEGY--IMPETUS FOR CHANGE**

It is important to understand what brought on this radical transformation. The world that emerged after World War II was fraught with new dangers. The Soviet Union, once the unlikely ally of the U.S. was now a suspicious and feared rival.[2] Although a Communist threat was emerging, the U.S. Army continued to de-mobilize at a rapid rate. From a World War II high of 8,267,958 soldiers, the U.S. Army dropped to 554,030 by 1948.[3] Although the Army increased strength slightly after 1948, it struggled to train and man its divisions.[4] As this de-mobilization continued, the Truman Administration placed great confidence in the possession of atomic weapons. Although the Russians had displayed the capability to detonate a device in 1949, the U.S. responded to the loss of this monopoly by hastening the design of the more powerful hydrogen bomb.[5]

In June of 1950, the Cold War grew intensely hot as North Korean forces invaded South Korea, plunging the U.S. and the United Nations into a long and bitter struggle. The challenges of the Korean War are well documented elsewhere and are beyond the scope of this paper; however a number of legacies emerged. The threat of global war with the Soviet Union and Communist China appeared even more imminent. The U.S. Army entered the war unprepared and eventually gained a stalemate after taking savage losses. The U.S. was determined not to fight such a conflict again. As President Eisenhower took office, he was determined to craft a

new strategy to take advantage of America's enormous technological potential, reduce the reliance on manpower and protect the nation's economy.

After exploring a range of possible responses to the Soviet Union, the administration ended with a containment policy articulated in NSC 153/1, which recognized the importance of a "strong retaliatory capability sufficient to inflict massive damage on the Soviet war-making capability, at a level that the Soviets must regard as… unacceptable and providing a basis for winning a general war should one be forced upon us."[6] Eisenhower strongly believed that he could rely on the threat of atomic weapons to thwart Russian expansion and accept risk by reducing conventional forces. Unlike the Truman administration, Eisenhower did not regard nuclear devices as special weapons, but as the inevitable consequence of technological advance.[7]

By the summer of 1953, Eisenhower had announced the selection of an entirely new group of joint chiefs. Not only would he make sweeping changes to American defense strategy, he would have a fresh group of senior officers who concurred with his vision. Admiral Arthur Radford, the Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Fleet was chosen as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Admiral Robert B. Carney was chosen as Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). General Nathan F. Twining was selected as the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and General Matthew B. Ridgway as the Chief of Staff of the Army. These joint chiefs would work under the leadership of the new Secretary of Defense, Charles E. Wilson, formally president of General Motors. Soon Eisenhower's emerging strategy was labeled the "New Look" by Secretary Wilson's public relations staff.[8]

As the Army entered the summer of 1953, the stage was set for the its search for relevance in this new "atomic age." The Korean War was over and Secretary Wilson was determined to make tremendous budget cuts in the Department of Defense. The New Look represented enormous growth for the Air Force as it continued to build Strategic Air Command.[9] In contrast, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs offered little guidance to the Army other than directives to reduce budget and manpower. No common vision existed for an Army role in the Atomic Age. The New Look strategy had little room for a conventional army. The strategy was almost entirely reliant on nuclear delivery by an expanding Air Force. The New Look strategy forced the Army to change. How it changed and the nature of change was strongly influenced by the Army Chiefs of Staff.

**THE RIDGWAY ERA--CONTROVERSY AND POLITICS**

General Ridgway was sworn in as Chief of Staff of the Army in August of 1953 and led the Army through the early years of the Eisenhower Administration. With a former Army general as president, some might have thought that the road ahead would be easier for the Army. The opposite was the case. The Army faced an unprecedented time of crisis. The peace time Army was always a place where budget battles were fought, yet for Matthew B. Ridgway, it would be a battle for the very essence of the Army.

Few officers have been as prepared for the role of Chief of Staff as Ridgway. The son of a career officer, he was the epitome of the professional warrior. He was exposed early in his career to the nature of strategy and politics due to his unique skill in language, having accompanied senior civilian leaders and officers to South America. General George Marshall recognized Ridgway's talent and potential and helped ensure his rapid ascent. He commanded the famed 82nd Airborne Division thru Italy and France and eventually commanded the XVIII Airborne Corps at the end of the war. During the Korean War, Ridgway earned national acclaim as he led the beleaguered Eighth Army in Korea, eventually replacing the legendary commander of the Far East, General Douglas Macarthur and later General Eisenhower as the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR). Thus, Ridgway entered the position of Chief of Staff eminently qualified to advise the president and Secretary of Defense on matters of security.

As soon as Ridgway was sworn in he made it clear that he would be an independent and free-thinking Chief of Staff. He fully understood his subordination to civilian leadership, but he asserted that he would give "fearless and forthright expressions of honest, objective professional opinion up to the moment when they themselves, the civilian commanders, announced their decisions."[10] Challenges came immediately. This, however, did not fit Eisenhower's ideas of how the Joint Chiefs should operate. "The administration wanted the JCS to take a corporate view of military decision making rather than fall back into the squabbling and wrangling that occurred in the Truman years."[11] As soon as possible, the new Chairman of the Joint Staff, Admiral Radford, brought all the new chiefs out on the Presidential yacht USS *Sequoia*. The goal was to reach consensus on the New Look policy. The "Sequoia Plan" called for huge redeployment of troops back to the continental U.S., with an increase in strategic mobility. Continental defense would become the first priority. [12] Within two days, the chiefs reluctantly agreed in principle to the concept, but with a number of caveats that were almost ignored. Admiral Radford saw it as consensus; Ridgway clearly saw it as near coercion.[13]

Ridgway's term as Chief of Staff was a bitter experience. Instead of being the satisfying culmination of years of service, it was a time of extreme frustration and is expressed in detail in Ridgway's biography, *Soldier*, which was published shortly after his retirement.

Ridgway was under constant pressure to cut manpower, although he continually highlighted global commitments in light of national security and enemy capability. Secretary of Defense Wilson asked, "Why don't you reduce the strength of your combat divisions? Pull them down to 85 per cent. Why don't you inactivate certain units? Just keep them on a cadre basis?"[14] This frustrated Ridgway, who first-hand saw the results of such skeleton organizations during the dark days of the Korean War. Although Ridgway agreed that atomic weapons had a special usefulness to the Army, he derived from his extensive experience in combat both at the operational and strategic level that the Communist forces might continue to engage in limited wars. Ridgway commented, "Wars are still fought for little bits of bloody earth, and they are only ended when the enemy's will to resist is broken, and armed men stand victorious on his home soil."[15] Technology could not solve this problem of having to put American soldiers in remote places and gain victory. [16] This was not just a case of service rivalry. Ridgway argued strongly that he had no conflict with the Air Force. He felt he was "misinterpreted". He pointed out that as an airborne corps commander, he had relied extensively on airpower to support him. He clearly saw a role for strategic bombers. What Ridgway argued was that a number of New Look concepts were merely rhetoric and not supported by concrete programs. Could the U.S. really contemplate the destruction of Europe to save it? How could there be a "highly mobile Army" while the Air Force continued to reduce the number of troop carrier wings?[17]Under the New Look, Ridgway argued that Army gained no additional ability to deploy. He was also concerned with the lack of emphasis on close air support. He had grappled with this problem in Korea and knew how important it would be in the next major war. The New Look relied heavily on the use of ready reserves; however, Ridgway indicated that this expectation was unrealistic. The Army believed that future war could come with little warning and that even under the most optimistic conditions, reserve forces would not be ready for use.[18]

Throughout this process, Ridgway felt frustrated by Secretary of Defense Wilson. Ridgway sarcastically commented in his biography that, "After each exchange of views with Wilson, I came away convinced that either his mental processes operated on a level of genius so high I could not grasp his meaning, or that considerations beyond the soldier's comprehension were influencing his thinking."[19] Wilson was one of the most controversial and unpopular men in the Eisenhower Administration. Wilson had no experience in defense matters, but as the president of General Motors and one of the highest paid executives in

America, he represented exactly what Eisenhower wanted for the Defense Department, a fiscally conservative businessman to run the day-to-day operations of the department. Lieutenant General James Gavin, who served on the Army Staff, remembered, "Mr. Wilson tended to deal with his Chiefs of Staff as though they were recalcitrant union bosses. I have known General Ridgway, after weeks of painstaking preparation, to brief Mr. Wilson on a problem with lucidity and thoroughness. At the conclusion Mr. Wilson would gaze out the window and ask a question that had no relevance whatsoever to the subject of the briefing. Among his aides this was known as taking the briefer 'around the world.'"[20] The relationship stretched the civilian-military relationship to the limit. Ridgway strongly believed that he presented the best advice he could on the grave matters of national security, only to be ignored by a secretary whose only priority was "more bang for the buck." Ridgway lamented, "This military budget was not based so much on military requirements, or what the economy of the country could stand, as on political considerations."[21]

**THE CULTURE OF THE NEW LOOK ARMY--ADAPTING TO CHANGE**

What was the culture of the Army like during these times of intense transition and reflection upon its roles and missions?[22] Reading contemporary literature of the era reveals an Army concerned over the future of the profession. An article written in the *Army Combat Forces Journal* of February 1955 is typical.[23] The authors clearly identify the shortcomings of the New Look and reliance on massive retaliation. "Reliance on nuclear weapons and strategic air-delivery systems has been a clear signal to the Communist that ….we are unprepared to stop limited war."[24] Army professionals looked to Korea and especially Indochina, where they saw a limited war, unaltered by possession of nuclear weapons. This served as evidence that the "Army must prepare for all kinds of wars: general and limited, conventional and thermonuclear." Other writers sarcastically commented on the clear dominance of the USAF. "It has become clear that the Army is now an auxiliary service…while the Air Force girds its loins to fight our wars."[25]Prominent military affairs writers such as Hanson Baldwin commented on the ultimate need to control the land, a mission that only the Army could do. Hanson wrote, "The development of nuclear weapons and of high speed devices to deliver them to targets has not made land power obsolete."[26]This might seem obvious today, but a fierce debate raged that "firepower" could be harnessed to accomplish any mission. Perhaps the debate today is on the reliance on "effects-based" warfare delivered by air platforms vs. the unsophisticated Army mission of placing soldiers street to street. [27]

In response to this search of relevance, General Ridgway directed the publication of Pamphlet 21-70, *The Role of the Army*.[28] It was distributed to *every* officer and cadet in the United States Army, and emphasized the unique role the Army played as the "decisive" element of victory. It addressed concerns over the possession of nuclear weapons but assured the reader that the Army would remain essential to national security. Furthermore, it did not discount technology, but emphasized the Army's work in obtaining the newest weapons such as the 280 mm Atomic Cannon.[29] However, its summary provides an interesting warning that captures the essence of the Army's concern: "The vision of a few technicians twisting the dials of complicated devices, or 'pushing' buttons, and thereby settling the destinies of nations, is an entertaining theme when we find it in a science-fiction story; there is no place for it in the stern realities of our profession." [30]

In June of 1955, General Ridgway retired in frustration.[31] Although he strongly proclaims in his biography that he planned to retire due to reaching 60 years of age, it is clear that President Eisenhower was glad to see Ridgway leave after two years as Chief of Staff. Eisenhower thought Ridgway would go along with the "party line"; instead due to deep loyalty to his responsibility as advisor, he intensely questioned the policies of the New Look and sought a relevant role for the Army. He did not discount technology, but accurately warned that technology would not alleviate the dirty business of placing soldiers in rugged terrain to achieve decisive victory. The culture of the Army clearly was one ready to adapt and modernize, yet the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense could not offer a practical or even coherent vision to aim for.

**TRANSFORMATION MEASURES**

Although Ridgway had pointed out his concerns of the New Look policy, he dutifully obeyed its direction to reduce manpower and budget.[32] In 1955, the Army continued to streamline personnel, dropping almost 300,000 soldiers from FY 54 to FY 55.[33] Particularly noteworthy was the fact that even during downsizing, the number of active Army divisions increased to 20 in March of 1955. "Modernization and streamlining were the intense keynotes of the Army's operations during 1955."[34] There should be no perception that the Army "dragged its feet" during this time of intense change. Although as mentioned, concerns of culture and relevance remained, there was tremendous activity and noticeable change was taking place.

The Army enthusiastically pursued the fruits of emerging guided missile technology. By 1955, nine separate missile systems were in use or in active development.[35] These systems were divided into three areas: space exploration, tactical surface-to-surface and air defense.

Due to great German scientists and engineers, such as Warner von Braun and the vigorous application of research funding, projects such as the Redstone Missile, were on the leading edges of space technology. The Army led all the services in research and development for these long range systems. The Army argued the need for even more resources and when the Soviets launched the first satellite in the world--Sputnik, in 1957, the perception of a "missile gap" gap with the USSR emerged. The Army subsequently regained American pride with the launch of Explorer I, four months later. In retrospect, it is hard to see the connection between these programs and the operational role of the Army. Missiles could be launched hundreds, if not thousands of miles, but there was no realistic application on the tactical battlefield. The tremendous problem of "sensor to shooter" interface was nowhere close to being addressed. Even General Taylor commented to Army War College students on the limitations of such weapons in 1959.[36] Why did the Army pursue such programs? Historian Andrew Bacevich has observed that: "The Army in the 1950s was like an aging corporation challenged to modernize or face extinction. The missile program let the Army off the hook." Faith in technology was perhaps even stronger in the 1950s than we feel today. It was the age of cars with fins, Steve Canyon, and science fiction movies.[37] Army leaders clearly saw the future in ultra-modern weapons and identified with the culture of the country. Conventional weapons were simply unpopular and would gain little support in budget battles.[38] Additionally, Army leaders saw these large nuclear missiles as merely an extension of the role of artillery, the "ability to provide both supporting and counter battery fire in larger volume than ever before envisaged." [39]

The growth of air defense missile technology was nested in the prescribed continental defense mission of the Army. The mission of air defense, due to the new threat of strategic nuclear attack, took on great significance in the Eisenhower Era and the Army embraced the mission will full vigor. In January 1955, President Eisenhower summarized these views when he wrote, "…due to the destructiveness of modern weapons and the increasing efficiency of long-range bombing aircraft, the United States has reason, for the first time in its history, to be deeply concerned over the serious effects which a sudden attack could conceivably inflict upon our country."[40] To meet this threat the United States built a continental air defense system that was based on a layer of sensors, or distant early warning (DEWS). By 1956 the Army possessed an astonishing 96 Air Defense Artillery Battalions, of which nearly half were equipped with the new Nike Missile.[41] This growth was a clear indicator of the changing role of the Army. The Nike represented a leap of technology from conventional anti-aircraft artillery to missile. The Nike had a range of over 75 miles and was armed with either conventional or nuclear warheads.[42]Thousands of Army personnel found themselves manning Nike units that ringed key

population centers such as Washington D.C., New York and San Francisco.[43] The Army was proud of the Nike Missile and the high-tech image it gave the Army, although it did not improve the core function of the Army to defeat enemy land forces. It was often displayed during Armed Forces Days and replica Nikes were placed on the sedans of U.S. Army recruiters.[44] For the foreseeable future, the Army would dominate this specified mission of point air defense although it was often at odds with similar programs of the Air Force such as the *Bomarc*. [45]This multiplicity of missile programs would frustrate Secretary of Defense Wilson and his successor, Neil H. McElroy and displayed the department's lack of overall vision and guidance for weapons development throughout the "Missile Age."[46]

The Army energetically sought to develop new doctrine and tactics for a force that could operate in an atomic environment. Although only used to finish World War II and never used during the Korean War, atomic weapons were not viewed as an anomaly, but as an accepted part of the modern battlefield. Atomic weapons represented the expansion of firepower. Official reports and professional journals are filled with descriptions of exercises involving both real and simulated nuclear conditions. Allied professional writing of the era reflects a similar exchange of ideas.[47] In 1955, over 90,000 soldiers participated in such tests.[48] A typical test of the era was APPLE 2 (May 1955), where an armored task force maneuvered into ground zero only minutes after the explosion of a 29-megaton weapon.[49] Such publications as the *Army Combat Forces Journal* gave an optimistic picture of the test. "The claim of tankers that armor will be the decisive arm in atomic war put an impressive bid before dawn on 5 May when the tanks and armored personnel carriers of Task Force Razor crashed forward under the churning, mushrooming burst of APPLE 2, minutes after zero hour. The steel monsters shook off the atomic heat, blast and radiation, leaving the occupants unharmed. It was the first time men had been above ground on Yucca Flat during an atomic explosion."[50] While this was a seemingly profitable exercise, historian Andrew J. Bacevich discovered classified reports that painted a more disturbing picture. Army reports called the exercise an "unrealistic maneuver" where the posture of the tested unit would be "impossible in a combat situation." Due to the extreme delicacy of using live atomic weapons, numerous, unrealistic precautions were taken, but in the end, the test revealed little. No proficient unit would be administratively postured in combat. If this had been atomic combat, many soldiers would have been easily killed. As we now know, the effects of radiation were sadly underestimated and numerous unsuspecting soldiers were needlessly exposed to radiation. APPLE 2 displays the danger of conducting operational tests where the outcome is foretold by the institution.[51]

This optimistic approach to operations on an atomic battlefield were displayed in such articles as *Training for Armor Units in Atomic Warfare* where the author described the Atomic Staff Officer (ASO) of the G3 section issuing *atomic casualty assessment calculators* or "cookie cutters" to exercise umpires.[52] Such training devices uncomplicated the tricky business of determining simulated casualties from 20 Kiloton weapons. In hindsight the Army's approach may have seemed flawed, but it sincerely desired to adapt to what it perceived, using a more modern term, to a "revolution of military affairs". What the Army concluded by these tests and from professional debate was the need for ground forces to remain dispersed in nearly autonomous task forces and remain mobile to quickly mass, exploiting the effects of nuclear firepower.[53] The seeds for future organization and tactics were being sown. General Ridgway had sensed such change would be necessary and before departing his post, had directed tests for the Atomic Field Army or ATFA where divisions would test the concept of more "independent battalions."[54]

Army transformation was not completely about equipment and technology. The Army made some significant policies regarding personnel. Recognizing the importance of morale and cohesion, the Army implemented a "buddy" system where groups of four soldiers would move from basic training and remain together in their next duty station.[55] Additionally, the Army had an ambitious program called OPERATION GYROSCOPE, where entire divisions would rotate from the continental United States to overseas and *vice versa*, thereby promoting unit cohesion. The first unit to execute was the famed 1 st Infantry Division, which rotated en mass from Germany to Fort Riley, Kansas in the summer of 1955.[56] The Army promoted a number of re-enlistment programs and education incentives to enrich the quality of the American soldier. One measure was simple, but controversial. In 1956, the Army gave up its "Brown Boots" and OD uniforms and transitioned to black boots and the present Army-green Class A uniform.[57] It was hoped that this move would provide a smarter and more up-to-date appearance for the Army. Although it was a simple change, for some old soldiers it caused cultural resentment. All these measures make a fascinating parallel with today, where talk is dominated by recent proposals: adoption of the black beret, investigating unit manning or changing recruitment strategies.

The New Look Army adopted a number of specific measures in order to transform itself. In retrospect however, the growth of ballistic missiles, expansion of air defense units and promotion of tactical nuclear weapons and doctrine were of dubious value. None of these weapons were of use in the subsequent conflict--Vietnam.

**THE TAYLOR ERA--PENTOMIC DIVISIONS**

General Maxwell Taylor took over the post of Chief of Staff of the Army on 30 June 1955 and held the position through the end of the New Look era. Taylor's tenure as Chief of Staff is best remembered for the change to the Pentomic Division.[58] General Taylor came from the same airborne background as Ridgway, having commanded the famous 101st Airborne Division in World War II. However, Maxwell Taylor was a more astute "politician" than Ridgway. Eisenhower was relieved to see Ridgway depart and expected more cooperation from Taylor to implement the reforms of the New Look in the Army. General Taylor describes how he passed a "loyalty test" with Secretary Wilson, who questioned him on his readiness to carry out civilian orders. Ironically, Taylor would soon prove to be as critical of the New Look as Ridgway. Taylor discounted the fallacy of the massive retaliation theory and criticized the lack of "flexible response" –the ability for the Army to fight in limited wars due to constant reductions, lack of strategic mobility and reliance upon strategic air power. After retirement in 1959, Taylor described the shortcomings of the New Look policy in his book *The Uncertain Trumpet*.[59] As an indication of frustration, Taylor referred to the Army's experience under President Eisenhower as its "Babylonian Captivity."

Since 1954, the Army War College had been studying reorganizing Army units in a study called "Doctrinal and Organizational Concepts for the Atomic-Nonatomic Army During the Period 1960-1970" also known as the PENTANA study. The study investigated the use emerging concepts and technology and called for a new division built around five, self-sufficient battle groups. Not surprisingly many Army leaders found these PENTANA divisions to be unacceptable.[60] Culturally, the structure eliminated the venerable Regiment, the source of *esprit de corps* and also of a number of command and staff opportunities.[61] Most importantly, throughout numerous field tests, senior officers expressed deep concerns over the lack of sustainment structure, mobility and communication assets.[62] However, Taylor resolutely disregarded the critics and pressed on with the implementation of the new design, using his beloved 101st Airborne Division as the test-bed. He believed that the Army had to make radical change and adopt a nuclear theme or be left out as a viable member of the national defense structure.[63] Taylor pressed for the inclusion of tactical nuclear weapons down to battle group level in what was now termed the "Pentomic Division".[64] So dramatic and quick was the reorganization timeline, that by 1960, 51 Divisions of all components had been placed under the Pentomic design, a remarkable feat of force management and indicative of the pace of change.

Although Taylor will be remembered for the Pentomic Division, throughout his tenure as Chief of Staff he campaigned to improve the capabilities of the Army as an effective instrument of national policy. He warned of the need to respond to limited wars and emphasized the requirement for strategic transport for the Army. Taylor retired in 1959, but returned to military service in 1962 as the Chairman of the Joints Chief of Staff in the Kennedy administration. The Kennedy administration embraced the concept of preparing for limited wars and rejected the policies of the New Look, to include the Pentomic Division concept which had a surprisingly short life. Within a matter of months the U.S. Army would find itself fighting a war the New Look policies did not adequately address, a dirty, controversial, guerrilla war. The transformation of the 1950s was a memory.

**LEGACY OF THE NEW LOOK ARMY**

As the Army of 2003 approaches a new transformation, what can we learn from the transformation of 1953-1960? *First, we must remember that transformation is not new to the U.S. Army, it has occurred before.* Change is always difficult. Culturally the institution of the Army is wary of change, but that does not mean that once leaders direct change, the Army cannot adapt quickly and even radically. We have seen the immense challenges faced by two successive Chiefs of Staff. In the end, they had to balance the demand for change against what they thought was best not only for the institution of the Army, but also the nation. The problem is that just changing or transforming is not an end in itself. The Army must remain a relevant force for whatever it may be called to do for the nation. Trying to predict the future and adapt is extremely difficult and fraught with risk. The Army of 1953-60 got it wrong. Are we better prepared to predict what the future will look like?

Second, *it is easy to get mesmerized by technology and base the transformation on equipment.* Knowing it had to adapt, the Army transformed, holding true to its conviction that the foot soldier was still supreme, yet enthusiastically championing technology. However, much of the technology of the New Look was not supportive of the basic mission of the Army nor was it sufficiently mature. The Army was fascinated by atomic technology. If it was “atomic” it was good, if it was “conventional” it was not. Thus, the Army of the 1950s invested billions of dollars and manpower into such devices as “air transportable nuclear power plants,” yet waited until the 1960s to seriously develop helicopter technology and airmobile doctrine.[65] The Army led the nation in the development of guided missiles that could fly thousands of miles, yet had no way of acquiring targets to shoot at.”[66] Somehow, the Army had invested far too much faith in

nuclear/missile technology that did not assist the Army in its own most likely scenario, a “brush fire war.”[67]

The Army extensively changed its basic fighting formation, the Division, into highly dispersed battle groups. However, much of the potential success of the Pentomic Division was based on technology that was not yet developed. The Pentomic Division required reliable long-range radios, numerous helicopters and extensive mechanization. All these developments were promises to come, either awaiting technological breakthrough or funding that was not available. The lesson is clear today. Hardware is not the entire equation and technological breakthroughs that appear just around the corner can be frustratingly distant. [68] Transformation will be as much about people and ideas as it is about network-centric technology.

There are fascinating parallels to today’s transformation. In 2003, the Army does not enjoy the fruits of peace due to the end of the war, but instead is engaged in a protracted Global War on Terror. Although the Army of 1953 might have thought that it would enjoy favor in a new administration, the Army of 2003 has also found itself in controversy. A modern Chief of Staff, General Eric Shinseki clearly had disagreements with a controversial Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfield, who as a former CEO, looked for revolutionary improvements and rapid change much in the same way Secretary Wilson did. The Army continues to search for “relevance” and continues to emphasize the importance of land dominance. The Army is confronted by a perplexing array of new technology and continues a search for “leap ahead” break throughs. Instead of advances in atomic systems, the Army of 2003 is looking for ways to adapt information technology. Instead of nuclear firepower, some see precision guided munitions and “effects based” strategies as a new solution to applying military power. To make the Army Division more germane, there are proposals to make it more “modular” by changing structure from a division of three brigades to five “Units of Action.” The Army is also enthusiastic about experimenting with unit rotation policies, in order to gain cohesion and effectiveness similar to the goals of GYROSCOPE. In a parallel to Continental *Defense*, Department of Defense has placed new emphasis on *Homeland Defense* with examination of ballistic missile defense and power projection forces.

This is not to say that change or transformation is not positive. The Army must transform and adapt to the challenges of a changing world. We have to be cognizant that we have attempted radical change before, but it can be surprisingly impermanent. Perhaps it will continue to remain nearly impossible to peer out to the future and get it exactly right. Perhaps it is too much to accurately predict what the Army will look like in 2025. Is it better to attempt incremental change? Can we make radical changes and reorganizations that will last more than

a decade? This is the charter for the Army of 2003--to look to the past, learn and adapt. We must ensure that we do not discover that Army transformation of 2005 is reminiscent of the transformation of 1955, a blurred vision that did not prepare for the coming war of 1965.

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## ENDNOTES

[1] Les Brownlee, "*Remarks by the Honorable Les Brownlee, Under Secretary of the Army, The Cold War and Change, Conference of Army Historians*," 8 August 2002; available from<http://www.army.mil/leaders/USA/speeches.html>; Internet. Accessed 25 September 2003.

[2] February 1946, George F. Kennan, U.S. Charge d'affaires in Moscow, cabled an eight thousand word analysis of Soviet foreign policy to Washington. Kennan is credited with an early prediction that the U.S. would have a "long term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansion tendencies."

[3] Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 569

[4] The 2nd Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, Washington serves as an example of this troubling time. In 1948, it was at only 50% strength. Soon the Army changed its division structure by issuing a "reduction" table of organization. The new table merely cut out structure in each unit, hiding the personnel shortage problems. The U.S. Army and specifically units such as the 2nd Infantry Division had emerged from World War II highly trained. Within three short years, the Army had to declare that training distracters were so great that this famed division was declared" ineffective". This pattern continued throughout the Army of the late 1940s. As an indicator of decay, by 1947 all live fire training was banned. William W. Epley, *America's First Cold War Army 1945-1950, (*Arlington: Association of the United States Army, 1999), 17.

[5] Weigley., 502.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New Look: A Maximum Deterrent at a Bearable Cost: A Reappraisal,* (Carlisle: United States Army War College Strategy Conference Paper, 1991),16.

[8] Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President,* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1984), 171.

[9] Under the Eisenhower Administration, SAC would grow exponentially. In 1949 the entire USAF had only 55 wings, by 1951 it had 87 and in 1952, 98 wings.

[10] Matthew B. Ridgway and Harold H. Martin, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway,* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 270.

[11] Bruce E. Geelhoed, *Charles E. Wilson and Controversy at the Pentagon 1953-1957* , (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 130.

[12] Jonathan M. Soffer, *General Matthew B. Ridgway: From Progressivism to Reganism 1895-1993*, (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 179.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ridgway, 287.

[15] Ridgway, 290.

[16] Atomic weapons had clearly intimidated the Chinese at the negotiation table in 1952-53, but as the Communists gained more weapons they achieved some parity. These weapons did not deter the possibility of Communist backed insurgencies, such as what occurred in Indo-China. Thus leaders such as Ridgway took a realistic approach that the Department of Defense had to have the ability to fight conventionally. This later was expressed as “Flexible Response” by General Taylor.

[17] Weigley, 403.

[18] Ridgway, 291.

[19] Ibid., 274.

[20] James M. Gavin, *War and Peace in the Space Age,* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1958),155.

[21] Ridgway, 272.

[22] There were a number of anonymous writers who wrote to professional journals, expressing their concern for the future of the Army. See *Armed Forces Combat Journal* (February 1955). For an additional look at contemporary Army culture see: Donovan Yeuell, “Soldiering Is a Way of Life,” *The Army Combat Forces Journal,* (September 1954): 30-32.

[23] “Mission for the Army: the Winning of World War III,” *The Army Combat Forces Journal,* (February 1955): 16-20.

[24] Ibid.

[25] “Editorial” *The Army Combat Forces Journal,* (August 1955), 5.

[26] Hanson W. Baldwin, “Land Power as an Element of National Power,” *The Army Combat Forces Journal,* (January 1956), 17.

[27] In this same article, Hanson quotes Brigadier General Dale O. Smith, USAF, who gave a contemporary Air Force view: “With the development of atomic weapons, firepower can be packaged to provide almost any degree of force desired. From the caliber .45 shell of the pistol to the thermonuclear bomb, which is equivalent to several megatons of TNT, a whole spectrum of weapons is appearing, each one yielding a different degree of firepower. No longer are hosts of men necessary to achieve concentrated firepower at any one place. Selection of the appropriate weapon for the task will permit the desired fire with relatively small military organizations as compared to the past.” This represents an insightful glimpse into the almost hypnotic draw of technology as a solution to the complex and dirty problems that confronted military planners. How frustrating this would seem just a few years later as the U.S. struggled to find a technical solution to fighting the North Vietnamese Army. Nuclear weapons were certainly not a viable answer.

[28] See: Department of the Army, *Pamphlet 21-70,*(Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 29 June 1955)

[29] The Atomic cannon represented another “impractical” weapon that would serve the “New Look” Army. Although it could fire an Atomic warhead, its massive weight (86 Tons) and immobility proved that it was of little use on a “highly mobile” battlefield.

[30] *DA Pam 21-70*, 15.

[31] As a mark of his complete frustration, General Ridgway sent his famous letter to the Secretary of Defense, where he “summarized” his “concepts concerning the security and well being of the United States.” Found in Matthew B. Ridgway, *Security and Well-Being of the United States: A Farewell Letter to the Secretary of Defense,* Army War College Library, 1955. Ridgway would continue to comment extensively about the subject of national defense and subsequently revealed his displeasure with the administration through a series of articles in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Found in “My Battles in War and Peace,” *Saturday Evening Post,*(1,28 January, 4,11,18,25 February 1956)

[32] Manpower/Budget of the Army from 1953-1959, Reference: U*.S. Defense and Military Fact Book,* (Santa Barbra: ABC-CLIO) 1991. Table 5.Manpower: 1953 (1.5 M) 1954 (1.4 M) 1955 (1.3M) 1956 (1.0 M) 1957 (1.0M) 1958 (939 K) 1959 (889K). Budget: 1953 (17 B) 1954 (12 B) 1955 (8.7B) 1956 ( 8.5 B) 1957 (8.9 B) 1958 (9.1 B) 1959 9.5 B)

[33] Department of Defense, *Semiannual Report of the Secretary of Defense 1 Jan 1955 to 30 June 1955*, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1956), 93.

[34] Ibid., 83.

[35] Marvin L. Worley, *New Developments in Army Weapons, Tactics, Organization and Equipment,* (Harrisburg: Military Service Publishing Company, 1958), 27.

[36] Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era: The U.S. Army between Korea and Vietnam,* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1986), 94.

[37] Many articles on the Pentomic Era often point out that the contemporary Army image was found in “Beetle Bailey” and “Sergeant Bilko”, while the USAF had “Steven Canyon”. This observation originated in William V. Kennedy’s article, “The Army takes it on the Chin,” in the November-December1956 *Armor* Magazine, p. 17. An interesting glimpse into the frustrations of Army professionals over the differences between the Army and USAF.

[38] Bacevich, 99.

[39] “Requirement: Guided Missiles for the Army,” *The Army Combat Forces Journal,* (March 1956), 10.. The article states, “The Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile will become the Army artilleryman’s long thrust-the weapon that will permit him to play to the hilt his vital role of providing fire support to the Atomic Age U.S. Army.”

[40] Andrew J. Bacevich and Lawrence F, Kaplan, *Generals Versus the President: Eisenhower and the Army, 1953-1955,* (New York: Syracuse University, 1997), Document 4.

[41] Robert J. Watson, *Into the Missile Age: 1956-1960,* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1997), 404.

[42] Nike Hercules Specification, "Nike Hercules," available from http://www.redstone.army.mil/history/nikesite/nikeherc.html>; Internet. Accessed. 29 August 2003.

[43] My Father-in-Law, Specialist 5 Basil F. Baker represented one of these soldiers. Born and raised in West Virginia, he found himself stationed in the heart of New York City in a Nike Hercules Battalion in 1956. Instead of being in the "field", he took the subway to work and shuttled throughout the city from battery to battery as a command driver.

[44] Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era*, 25.

[45] For information on Bomarc see: "Bomarc fact Sheet," available from http://www.spaceline.org/rocketsum/bomarc-a.html; Internet. Accessed 5 September 2003.

[46] Detailed discussion of continental air defense programs in Chapter XIII, Watson.

[47] For an interesting French Army perspective see: F.O. Miksche, *Atomic Weapons and Armies*, (New York: Praeger Publications, 1955)

[48] Department of Defense, *Semiannual Report of the Secretary of Defense Jan 1 to 30 June 1955*, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1956), 84.

[49] The series of Atomic tests conducted during the 1950s were labeled "OPERATION TEAPOT." Each detonation was labeled with a different code with numerous sub exercises. Thus APPLE 2 was a 500 foot tower detonation with a yield of 29 kilotons at 0510 hours on 5 May 1955 in Area 1 of Yucca Flat. Units involved in the test or DESERT ROCK VI were formed from the 723rd Tank Battalion, Camp Irwin, California and support units from the 4th Armored Division, Fort Hood, Texas. For more information on APPLE 2 and other tests see http://www.aracnet.com/~pdxavets/teafs5.gif>Internet. Accessed 26 October 2003.

[50] Anthony Leviero, "Task Force Razor Shaves Big Apple 2," *The Army Combat Forces Journal,* (June 1955), 38-43.

[51] The Army must always ask this when conducting tests of new concepts and equipment. When conducting exercises such as the Advanced Warfighter Experiment (AWE) we should be ready for occasional negative results. Not all tests will be resounding successes. Also see CPT Everett C. Royal, "The Team of Mobile Warfare: Armor and Airborne," *Armor*, (March-April 1955): 4-6. Royal declares, "Troop tests have proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that combat units can move into an area after it has subjected to an atomic blast."

[52] George B. Pickett, "Training for Armor Units in Atomic Warfare," *Armor,* (September-October 1954), 14-15.

[53] Edward L. Rowny, "Ground Tactics in an Atomic War," *The Army Forces Combat Journal,* (August 1954), 21-25.

[54] John B. Wilson, *Maneuver and Firepower: The Evolution of Divisions and Separate Brigades.* (Washington D.C.: Center For Military History, 1998), 267.

[55] Department of Defense, *Semiannual Report of the Secretary of Defense Jan 1 to 30 June 1955*, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1956), 74.

[56] Ibid., 101. Also see "Don't Tinker with Gyroscope", *Army Combat Forces Journal*, (November 1954).

[57] See: "This Month's Pictures", *Army Combat Forces Journal*, (August 1955).

[58] The Pentomic Division transformed the standard U.S. Division of 17,000 soldiers which was built around three Regiments into a Division of five "Battle Groups" -–reducing the number of soldiers to 11,486. A Battle Group was an independent organization comprised of five companies (five platoons each), a mortar battery, a 105mm Howitzer battery and headquarters company. Due to the recurrence of organizations of five- the term "*Penta"* was used*,* meaning "five"-There is an interest parallel to the current concept of building five modular "Units of Action" in each Division in order to achieve more flexibility.

[59] Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959.

[60] Wilson, 271.

[61] The Pentomic Division eliminated most Battalion Commander positions since the Battle Group was commanded by a Colonel. The decision to go to this design shows a huge change of culture. Edward L. King gives a glimpse into this problem when as a young Captain he asked a question during the Infantry Advanced Course-- "Under present promotion policies it takes about eighteen years to go from Captain to Colonel. In this battle group there are only two command levels-company commander (CPT) and battle group commander (COL). Don't you think this is going to produce some pretty unqualified battle group commanders when they have to wait eighteen years between chances to command? The instructor answered, 'Well, yes, we considered what you are saying, and we recognize it is not desirable, but it's just the price we have to pay to have combat mobility on the atomic battlefield.' Reason did not enter into discussion of the Pentomic Division." Edward L. King, *The Death of the Army.* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972), 61. For a typical discussion of the loss of the Regiment, see: Elmer Schmeier, "Old Outfits Need Not Fade Away," *Army*, (May 1956): 20-23.

[62] See: Glen R. Hawkins and James J. Carafano, *Prelude to Army XXI: U.S. Army Division Design Initiatives and Experiments 1917-1995.* (Washington D.C. : Center For Military History, 1997)

[63] It is hard to find any strong proponents of the Pentomic design. It appears that General Taylor was convinced that the Army had to execute some radical changes to demonstrate that it was adapting to the nature of the Atomic battlefield. Additionally, since the Pentomic Division required fewer personnel, it would appear that the Army was "modernizing" while in reality it was downsizing. In 1999-2000 many battalions in the U.S. Army adopted the Division XXI design, where Mechanized and Armored battalion structure went from 4 companies to 3. In public statements, this reduction was being executed due to the greater capabilities of modern units and equipment. In reality this was due to manpower cuts where battalion "flags" were retained at the expense of companies. Interestingly, this change was not executed in 2ID and 3ID—units that had the highest probability of combat.

[64] The most unusual of these was the M28 120mm Atomic Battle Group Delivery System (Light) or" The Davy Crockett" which launched a 10 to 250 KT warhead only 1.24 miles. The Davy Crockett represents the height of the shortcomings of the Pentomic Army. The M28 could launch a weapon that would probably do as much harm to the crew and friendly units as to the enemy. The cost of such weapon must have high compared to the necessity of such items as Armored Personnel Carriers and Helicopters, which would have greatly improved the capabilities of units. The best source for info on the Davy Crockett appears to be a Cold War Veteran, Jim Lewis who has a very interesting website devoted to this strange weapon. ///www.guntruck.com/DavyCrockett.html>; Internet. Accessed 29 August 2003.

[65] Although a great proponent of missile research, Lieutenant General Gavin clearly understood the Army's need to expand mobility. He expressed this in his article: "Cavalry, and I Don't Mean Horses," *Armor*, (May-June 1954): 18-22. Gavin saw the great potential in the use of helicopters to provide battlefield mobility.

[66] Bacevich,142.

[67] In FY 1957 the Army spent 43% of its research budget on missiles, while only 4.5% on tactical vehicles. Bacevich,100. The importance of this fact is that the Pentomic Division was only viable if the entire organization was mechanized and widely equipped with reliable long-range communications. The M59 Personnel Carrier was never fully fielded in the Pentomic Division. It would take until the 1960s-70s for fielding of the M113A1 APC. Similarly, the VRC series of radios did not get into the hands on units until the 1960s. Without these modern enablers, the Pentomic Division had less, capability than the division structure it replaced.

[68] One example could be the Army's investment in the Future Combat System (FCS) upon which the future Unit of Action (UA) is built. The FCS relies extensively on "leap-ahead" technology. As of 2003, the question remains, "has this technology arrived yet?"

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